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GENDER AND THE POLITICS OF MUSIC IN THE EARLY ISLAMIC COURTS

Until the ninth century, the role of the professional musician in pre-Islamic Arabia and Mesopotamia was primarily fulfilled by women. Men were socially prohibited from working as musicians, though some transgressed gender and social boundaries by adopting feminine dress and playing 'women's' instruments. With the advent of Islam, patronage of qiyān (singing girls), mukhannathūn (effeminate) and later, male musicians, did not substantially change. During the early Abbasid era (750–950 CE), however, their collective visibility in court entertainments was among several factors leading to debates regarding the legal position of music in Islam. The arguments for and against took place in the realm of politics and interpretation of religious law yet the influence of traditional expectations for gendered musical performance that had existed on the cultural landscape for millennia also contributed to the formation of a musical semiotics used by both sides.

In this article, I examine the representation of musicians in the early Islamic court in Baghdad from the perspective of select ninth-century Arabic texts. First, I begin with a summary of the gender roles and performance expectations for pre-Islamic court musicians and point to their continuation into the early Islamic courts. Then, I suggest how the figure of the musician became a key referent in the development of a musical semiotics used in medieval Islamic music discourse.

During the ninth century of the early Islamic dynastic era (661–950 CE), the centrality of music to entertainments at court sparked vigorous debate as to what it meant to be a musician, what sound genres constituted music and, ultimately, questions as to the legal position, or allowability, of music in Islam. Music had been important in the polytheistic cultures of pre-Islamic Arabia and Mesopotamia, and with the institution of Islam few of the existing musical practices changed. The ninth and tenth centuries were a time of great intellectual growth in the Islamicate Empire, producing texts on a bewildering array of topics. At the same time, the influx of foreigners, ideas and cultural practices also inspired fear that outside influences would dilute or destroy the fundamentals of Islamic belief.

Music increasingly became a popular topic for literature owing to a swiftly developing court culture and growing middle class. Contact and trade with Persia, Greece, India and other outside cultures introduced foreign musicians and new musical systems, instruments and performance practices to the court. These also included the various trappings of entertainment such as drinking, illicit sex and calculated displays of personal wealth, none of which was allowable by Islam. In addition, there was a

long tradition within Arabian culture of patronage of *qiyān*, or singing girls, *mukhannathūn* or cross-gendered male singers and specialists in mourning and elegists, who could be of either gender.

A split arose between traditionalists, who advocated adherence to what they believed was the original message and intent of the Prophet Muhammad and those who felt outside influences were compatible, even beneficial, to the growing Islamic community. Rather than acting as a barrier, the resulting debates helped to create an Islamic context and framework for art, music, literature, philosophy and law.

By the ninth century, questions were arising about the appropriateness of music, visual art and court amusements, prompting spirited discussion by Islamic scholars as to what traditions were considered worthy of continuance and what should go because of their association with polytheism or foreign customs. At the heart of such discussions was the effect of music on the listener, rather than issues related to performance. The effect of music was key because active listening to music was considered an act of submission and one should only ever submit to God.¹ As the relationship between musician and patron became more entangled with worldly pursuits, listening to music became synonymous with listening to the world. While the Sufi argued that music, when used correctly, was a potential path to the divine, counter-arguments focused on the moral consequences of being diverted from religion. These debates soon evolved into a separate literary genre, referred to as *samāʿ*, which focused specifically on debating the legal position of music in Islam. In Arabic, the root *samāʿ* refers not only to hearing and listening, but the choice to listen.²

Music had been part of the metaphoric language of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, but the development of a specific system of referents to address music in a literary context became increasingly necessary in the ninth and tenth centuries. Attempts to incorporate new and old practices and

¹ The concept of 'submission' within an Islamic context is complicated and broad. While there is an aspect of the Western understanding of submission as a form of abjectness or subjugation, the full sense of submission in Islam is more closely tied to acceptance, as everything a believer does relates to a deeper understanding that God, not they, is in control. A believer does have free will and the ability to make choices, but God helps focus and define what those choices will be. Thus, to turn such power over to music or sensual pursuits not only turns one away from God temporarily, but can ultimately lead to apostasy. The link between music and apostasy will be discussed further below.

² For a concise definition of *samāʿ* (سَمَاع), see H. Wehr, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. M. Cowan (Urbana, Ill., 1994), pp. 501–2. *Samāʿ* literature, as found in primary sources and secondary analyses, is a broad area of enquiry. It is generally considered to relate to Sufi studies owing to the influence of early Sufi refutations of arguments against allowing music in Islam. For the definition of *samāʿ* in the context of music and mysticism, see J. During, 'Samāʿ', in *The Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition*, viii (Leiden, 1995), pp. 1018–19, and A. Gribetz, 'The Samāʿ Controversy: Sufi vs Legalist', *Studia Islamica*, 74 (1991), pp. 43–62. Subsequent references to the *Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition* will be abbreviated *EI*².

ideologies into an Islamic frame continued to be shaped by traditional expectations of gendered musical performance which had existed on the cultural landscape for millennia.

The influence of tradition can be seen in the evolution of musicianship in the ninth-century Baghdadi court. Musical accomplishment had previously been related to a musician's skill as a singer and his/her knowledge of poetry, and secondarily as an instrumentalist, but by the ninth and especially the tenth century, musicianship incorporated a constellation of performance expectations.³ Social performance required acceptable dress, comportment, a keen sense of politics and to be moderate in one's intake of food and wine. Gender performance was similarly linked to dress, but also instrument and genre choices. Actual performance required a high level of technical skill, a prodigious memory and the ability to adapt depending on the whim of the audience.

As a result, literary references to musicians and performance came to be nuanced so that specific terms were used for each type of musician, which in turn evoked their gender, genre speciality and the social status of their audience/patron. These terms include *qiyān* (singing girls), *jawāri* (female slaves, musical concubines), *mukhammathūn* (effeminate), *musiqar* (musician, male) and *mughanni* (singer). While some terms could be used generically, such as *mughanni* or *jawāri*, some, such as *qiyān*, indicated a particular class of musician within the court hierarchy. Eventually, a literary reference to 'singing girls', for example, had the effect not only of evoking a specific performance context, but the patrons, types of music and poetry used and, depending on the author, the appropriateness of all of the above. The institution of such associations contributed to the formation of a musical semiotics used by all participants in subsequent discussions.⁴

³ Not unlike the medieval West, there was a period of time when the early Islamic instrumental musician was considered subordinate to the singer or poet. Instrumentalists were viewed as technicians or craftspeople and the definition of a musician was one who theorised or philosophised about music, not one who played. This distinction is emphasised in the labels used for musicians, as they can be traced to the function of their role in the culture. The Arabic term for singing girl, *qayna*, is one such example. While the origin of the association of the term with singing girls is still debated, the Arabic word *qayn* (*qaym*) also means blacksmith, or simply, technician. As singing girls were, on one level, musical technicians and skilled labourers, this use makes sense. For a discussion of the etymology of *qayna*, see C. Poche, 'Music in Ancient Arabia from Archaeological and Written Sources', in V. Danielson et al. (eds.), *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: The Middle East* (New York, 2002), pp. 357–62. See also C. Pellat, 'Kayna', *EI*², iv, pp. 820–4, and the Introduction to al-Jahiz, *Epistle on the Singing Girls*, trans. A. F. L. Beeston (Warminster, 1980), p. 2.

⁴ I use the terms music discourse and music semiotics here in the following sense. By discourse, I mean the system of referents used in specialist and non-specialist texts to discuss technicalities related to the definition of a musician, sound genres and the relationship between

In this essay, I examine the beginning stages in the development of music discourse in an Islamic context, with an emphasis on the influence of associations with gender and musical identity from antiquity. I begin with a brief summary of what is known about performance expectations for musicians in the Ancient Near East and Arabia, followed by an outline of their continuation in the musical practices of the Islamic court. When I refer to the Ancient Near East, I mean Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula. As this is a vast topic, I have, of necessity, limited my discussion to these regions. Using examples of the representation of musicians and their performance from select ninth-century Arabic texts, I suggest that the performance of gender not only informed the musical and social identity of Islamic court musicians, but influenced the development of Islamic musical discourse.

The ninth and tenth centuries saw incredible intellectual growth in the Islamicate world; particularly in Baghdad, which was the centre of the Abbasid caliphate.⁵ Numerous texts are available which focus on music in some fashion, many of which are lost but were preserved in fragmentary form in later works.⁶ Music literature from this time falls into three loose categories: *ghina'* (song), *samā'* and *musiqa*. Though all three were within the genre of *adab* (literature, or belles-lettres), *ghina'* and *samā'* were intended for a wider audience and included poetry, chronicles, histories and treatises. Within these genres one finds a wide array of topics related not only to the mechanics of music, such as theory, history and practical musicianship, but also performance practices, ethnographic studies, gossip accounts of musicians, medical uses for sound and social criticism.

Musiqa developed into a specialist discipline mostly concerned with music theory, philosophy, aesthetics and practical musicianship. It was inspired by the rediscovery and translation of Greek music theorists in

performer and audience. By semiotics, I am referring specifically to the language of literary symbols that came to be used in Arabic literature to discuss the social context of music performance and accounts of actual musical performance, particularly in discussions regarding the effect of music on the individual and the potential cultural impact of music patronage.

⁵ The term 'Islamicate' was proposed by Marshall Hodgson as a more accurate referent for the diverse cultures that became part of the Islamic world. He argued that using 'Islamic' or 'Islamdom' was too totalising or reductive to religion alone, whereas 'Islamicate' was more holistic by including the influence of all aspects and sects of the Islamic religion as well as those cultures which were part of Islamic culture but were not Muslim. See M. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols (Chicago, 1974), i, pp. 57–60.

⁶ The insertion of partial, and sometimes whole, works into a new text was common in medieval Islamic literature. These insertions were often used to build the author's authority, but they were not always included with attribution. Presumably, with more famous works, the reader would recognise the style or text and thus such attribution was unnecessary. In some cases, however, authors were just as likely attempting to imitate or use another's work as their own. Through such borrowings, a number of lost texts and text fragments were subsequently rediscovered.

the ninth century as evidenced by the adoption of the Greek word for music.⁷ Greek musical theory at this time was only just beginning to make an impact on Islamic musical discourse; later it provided a different theoretical framework for scholarly attempts to define and systematise the many melodic and rhythmic modes already in use.

Because of the diversity of texts available, I have limited my analysis to those texts which incorporate discussion of music as part of a larger literary work, written by authors intimately acquainted with the Abbasid court and court culture in ninth-century Baghdad. These texts represent different genres within *adab*, yet each provides a representation of music performance from the perspective of the audience, rather than the musician. They are all, essentially, social commentary under the guise of literature. The texts are the *Kitāb al-Muwashsha* (The Book of Brocade), an etiquette manual written by the grammarian and scholar Abu Tayib ibn Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn al-Washshā (d. 936), the *Risala al-Qiyān* (Epistle on the Singing Girls) by the great satirist Abu Uthman 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz (776/7–868/9 CE) and the *Dhamm al-Malāhī* (Censure of Instruments of Diversion) of Abu Bakr Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Sufyan ibn Abi'l Dūnya (823–94 CE), which is considered the first treatise to argue against the legality of music in Islam.⁸ In addition, I reference the *Kitāb al-Aghani* (Great Book of Songs) of Abu'l faraj al-Isbahani (897–969 CE), the Umayyad and Abbasid histories of al-Tabari (839–923 CE), the Abbasid histories from *Murīj al-Dhahab* (Meadows of Gold) of al-Mas'udi (d. 928 CE) and the memoirs of the *qadi* (judge) al-Tanukhi (940–94 CE).⁹

⁷ For a concise definition of the differences between *musiqā* and *ghina* in Islamic music discourse, see O. Wright, 'Musikī', *EL*², vii, pp. 681–8 and H. Farmer, 'Ghina', *EL*², ii, pp. 1072–5.

⁸ These texts are available in translation and in modern Arabic editions. The editions referenced here are: al-Jahiz, *Epistle on the Singing Girls*, trans. Beeston; Abu Dūnya, *Tracts on Listening to Music: Being the Dhamm al-Malāhī of Ibn Abi Dūnya*, trans. J. Robson (London, 1937); Ibn Abi'l Dūnya, *Dhamm al-Malāhī*, ed. M. 'Abd al Qadir 'Ata (al-Qahirah, 1987); Ibn al-Washshā, *Le Livre de brocart* (The Book of Brocade), trans. S. Bouhhal (Paris, 2004); Ibn al-Washshā, *al-Muwashsha, aw a-ẓarfū wa l-ẓarfa* (Beirut, 1960). With the exception of citations from the *hadith* and *Mu'allaqat*, the Arabic for the longer quotes is provided.

⁹ Abu'l faraj al-Isbahani, *Kitāb al-Aghani*, 24 vols. (Beirut, 1955–61); al-Mas'udi, *Murīj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1965–6); al-Mas'udi, *Les Prairies d'or*, trans. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, rev. and corr. C. Pellat (Paris, 1962–); al-Tabari, *The Early 'Abbasī Empire*, i: *The Reign of 'Abu 'Ja'far al-Mansur (AD 754–775)*, trans. J. A. Williams, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1988); al-Tabari, *The Early 'Abbasī Empire*, ii: *The Sons and Grandsons of Al-Mansur. The Reigns of al-Mahdi, al-Hadi and Harun al-Rashid*, trans. J. A. Williams, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1989); al-Muhassin ibn Ali al-Tanukhi, *Table Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge*, trans. D. S. Margoliouth (London, 1922).

MUSIC, GENDER AND PERFORMANCE IN THE
ANCIENT NEAR EAST

According to the extant documentary record, women formed the core of a professional musician class in the Ancient Near East and Egypt since at least 3,000 BCE. The record is extensive, including written and iconographic texts which represent or describe women performing at court, in private and in a variety of temple rituals. It also appears that certain instruments and literary genres were likewise associated with women early in recorded history. Women's instruments included varieties of small drums, tambourines, plucked and bowed strings and flutes, and women further specialised in mourning and lamentation.¹⁰

The majority of women musicians, though not all, were slaves acquired through conquest or trade. As slaves, women musicians were also frequently concubines and therefore musical as well as sexual commodities, used as trade goods or diplomatic gifts.¹¹ Since freedom in the Ancient Near East was often a relative or transitory state, to be a slave was not an impediment to social advancement or making a living. Therefore, while musicians might be rewarded or remunerated for their performance, the definition of a professional in this context depended less on financial or social distinction than on visibility.

What little is known about musical performance and ritual participation by non-slave women suggests that musical roles were additionally assigned according to rank and social status. In Mesopotamia, Egypt and Arabia, certain noble women, often daughters of kings, held the rank of high priestess, and as such were expected to conduct or preside over temple rituals.¹² Noble women and priestesses used specific instruments

¹⁰ Dynastic Egyptian art is rife with images of women playing flutes and various types of stringed instruments. There are also a number of textual references to women playing instruments in a variety of settings. See L. Manniche, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1991). Similar scenes can be found in Sumerian and Assyrian texts and are attested in the Judaic testament of the Bible as well. For example, in 1 Samuel 18:6–7 the women dance and play tambourine to welcome the victorious David home. See also the story of Jephthah and his daughter 'meeting him with dancing and tambourines' in Judges 11:34. Greek texts and art works reference the 'flute girls' who entertained at symposia and in taverns, and *hetaerae* (courtesans) were patronised for their musical and literary talent. For a brief survey of sources linking performance practices of women in the modern Middle East to those of the Ancient Near East, see V. Doubleday, 'The Frame Drum in the Middle East: Women, Musical Instruments and Power', *Ethnomusicology*, 43 (1999), pp. 101–34. See also C. Meyers, 'Of Drums and Damsels: Women's Performance in Ancient Israel', *Biblical Archaeologist*, 54 (1991), pp. 16–27.

¹¹ In addition to the slave trade, the regional exchange in male and female musicians, instruments and musical techniques flourished as early as the Ur III period in Sumer, approx. 2,500B BCE. See J. Franklin, 'The Global Economy of Music in the Ancient Near East', in *Sounds of Ancient Music* (Jerusalem, 2007), pp. 27–37.

¹² The extant performance notations found in poetry and epics from these regions indicate that rituals probably included a complex blend of music, recitation and diverse sound genres.

dedicated to various deities and some also composed hymns.¹³ In Ur III Sumer there were also free women who lived at certain temples in what might best be described as a cloister. Some of these women had rank and wealth of their own, including slaves or novitiates to take care of them in old age, but their specific role in the temple remains uncertain. It appears that while some paid to live there, others might have been given to the temple by their families. The record suggests that some worked in the temple bureaucracy, or possibly were participants in rituals related to the *hieros gamos*.¹⁴

Though less visible than women, there were also male musicians in the court and temple as well as individuals who had both male and female traits. The construction of gender in the Ancient Near East was broad and based on more factors than biological sex alone. The choice of instruments and specialisation in genre were components in the assignment of gender as much as dress or social behaviour. Gender could also potentially encompass different degrees of physical ability, including castration, blindness and lameness. Certain cultures, like Sumer, had a concept of three, possibly four genders, and many of these individuals were musicians, priests or artists. It has been difficult to determine the biological gender of these individuals not only because of the intrusion of modern assumptions about gender, but also because of the lack of gender in the Sumerian language.¹⁵

¹³ The sistrum in Egypt, dedicated to the goddess Hathor, was used only by noble women and high-ranking priestesses. See Manniche, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 85–6. The daughter of Sargon I, Enheduanna (c. 2285–2250 BCE), was a priestess of the moon god, Nanna, and also composed hymns to the goddess Inanna. For examples of her extant hymns, see the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL), <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>>.

¹⁴ The *hieros gamos* refers to the sacred marriage between the goddess and her son-god/lover. This marriage symbolised the union of heaven and earth and could be celebrated as an actual marriage, as between rulers, or in annual rituals involving the king and high priestess. In the Ancient Near East, women of the temple might become brides of the god and reside at the temple as *hierodules* (servants or temple attendants) or priestesses. For a discussion of temple women in Ancient Mesopotamia, see R. Harris, 'Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia?', in B. Lesko (ed.), *Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia* (Brown Judaic Studies Series, 166; Conference on Women in the Ancient Near East, 5–7 November 1987; Providence, RI, 1989), pp. 145–65.

¹⁵ It bears mentioning that male and third-gendered musicians existed in cultures with social restrictions against men making their living as musicians as well as those that did not have such strictures. As the majority of third-gendered individuals who have been identified as such were artists, musicians, temple attendants or shamans, the development of a third-gender cross-culturally seems to be linked to ritual, as many share commonalities such as providing music, performance and/or ritual services. In the context of Sumer, see R. Harris, 'Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites', *History of Religions*, 30 (1991), pp. 261–78, and J. Asher-Greve, 'The Essential Body: Mesopotamian Conceptions of the Gendered Body', *Gender & History*, 9 (1997), pp. 432–61.

Third-gendered musicians tended to be biologically male, though there were exceptions. Some of them were eunuchs, though many were not. Several were married with children or fostered children as potential heirs. Based on how they are described in the sources, their identity as individuals who lived between male and female biological and social definitions gave them the potential to mediate between the physical and spiritual world.¹⁶

Among the most studied third-gendered musicians in the ancient world are the Sumerian *gala*. They were specialists in lamentation, considered a women's genre, and spoke Emesal, which is theorised to have been a women's language. *Gala* also adopted women's hair styles and dress and played women's instruments. They could hold high rank at court, some rising as high as Chief Musician, and performed for important rituals as well as teaching in music schools. Many were also married, with biological or adopted children.¹⁷

Other examples of the link between music and gender in the Ancient Near East are similarly associated with visibility and ritual, and, just as frequently, with sexuality. These include the *hetaerae* of ancient Greece, and their intellectual training and use of masculine instruments, the ritual performances of the self-castrated, effeminate *galli* priests of Cybele and the musical concubines and blind singers of the Egyptian dynastic courts.¹⁸ These associations could be obvious, as with the explicit sexual images of

¹⁶ For example, in *Inanna's Descent into the Nether World*, the god Enki creates two entities, the *kur-gara* and *gala-tura*, to rescue Inanna. Both entities are non-gendered, enabling them to slip into the nether world and resist temptation. See *ETCSL*, *Inanna's Descent into the nether world*, <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.1#>>.

¹⁷ For studies of the *gala*, see M. R. Bachvarova, 'Sumerian *Gala* Priests and Eastern Mediterranean Returning Gods: Tragic Lamentation in Cross-Cultural Perspective', in A. Suter (ed.), *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 18–52; U. Gabbay, 'The Akkadian Word For "Third Gender": The *Kalu* (Gala) Once Again', in R. D. Biggs et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Chicago, 2008), pp. 49–56; I. J. Gelb, 'Homo Ludens in Mesopotamia', *Studia Orientalia*, 46 (1975), pp. 43–75; S. N. Kramer, 'BM 29616: The Fashioning of the *Gala*', *Acta Sumerologica*, 3 (1981), pp. 1–9; and P. Michalowski, 'Love or Death? Observations on the Role of the *Gala* in Ur III Ceremonial Life', *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 58 (2006), pp. 49–61. For gender, iconography and the *gala*, see J. Asher-Greve, 'The Essential Body'.

¹⁸ For example, see C. A. Faraone, 'The Masculine Arts of the Ancient Greek Courtesan: Male Fantasy or Female Self-Representation?', in M. Feldman and B. Gordon (eds.), *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York, 2006), pp. 209–20; W. Roscoe, 'Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion', *History of Religions*, 35 (1996), pp. 195–230, and Manniche, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 94–5, 99–100. Some ancient Egyptian musicians are presumed blind not only because of textual references to the existence of blind musicians, but because they are often represented as having deformed or slitted eyes. On the other hand, this might also have been the convention for rendering court musicians. Manniche makes a case for both possibilities. Other examples of the intersection between performance, gender and ritual existed outside the Ancient Near East, such as the *hijra* of India and the Native American *berdache*.

Gender and the Politics of Music

Egyptian musicians, or more subtle, as in poetic references to singing girls in Arabia.

MUSIC, GENDER AND LANGUAGE IN ISLAM

As in other Near Eastern cultures, urban and nomadic Arabs kept slave women as musicians and concubines, with the singing girl being the most visible form of musical entertainment in pre-Islamic Arabia. The term ‘singing girl’ could refer to any woman musician, including women of noble or free birth, but eventually came to signify a special class of slave courtesans. References to singing girls in pre-Islamic poetry and later Islamic histories depict them as professional singers and instrumentalists who were owned by the wealthy as well as available for hire in taverns and for private amusement. Their preferred instrument was the *‘ud* (lute) and similar instruments historically associated with women and secular entertainments. Singing girls were also sexually available.

The earliest poetic sources use formulaic descriptions to underscore the musical and sexual performance of singing girls, emphasising their eyes, hair and simple or seductive dress. Singing girls were always associated with wine, either literally in their capacity as servants or metaphorically in their ability to inebriate the senses.

Among the better-known references to singing girls from pre-Islamic poetry are those found in the *Mu‘allaqat*, or ‘Hanged Poems’. In the *Diwan* of Asha, for example, is the following passage:

The glass-bearer, busying here and there,
Shirt bottom tucked up,
Alert, agile.
How many a song – you’d think it sung
to a Persian harp – when a singing girl in a nightslip sings it,
How many a gowned lady, trailing silk,
How many a girl with a leather wine flask at her side,
have I spent my time enjoying,
Enduring trial by amorous talk and lengths of pleasure.¹⁹

And from the *Mu‘allaqat* of Labid:

And many a morning draught of a pure wine
And a slave girl with a lute,
Plucking with her thumb on its taut strings.²⁰

¹⁹ M. Sells, *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes* (Middletown, Conn., 1989), p. 64. See also R. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London, 2001), pp. 134–8 for additional references to musical entertainment by singing girls from pre-Islamic sources.

²⁰ S. Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca, 1993), p. 15, verses 59–60.

The portrayal of singing girls in the *hadith* likewise alludes to their role as entertainers as well as providing an indication of their social standing:²¹

Aisha, (*radhiyallahū anha*), reported: ‘Abu Bakr came to see me and I had two girls with me from among the girls of the Ansar and they were singing what the Ansar recited to one another at the Battle of Bu’ath. *They were not, however, singing girls* [emphasis mine]. Upon this Abu Bakr exclaimed: “What! (the playing of) this wind instrument of Satan in the house of the Messenger of Allah (sallallahū alayhi wasallām) and this too on Id day?” Upon this, the Messenger of Allah (sallallahū alayhi wasallām) said: “Abu Bakr, every people have a feast and it is our feast (so let them play on).”²²

The insistence that the musicians were not singing girls appears in other versions of this tradition as well, with varying degrees of indignation. Because of their associations with wealth, wine and hedonism, it would be improper for the Prophet or his favourite wife, Aisha, to employ them. This tradition has been interpreted in a number of ways. Some read it as proof that the Prophet approved of singing, while others assert it only serves to endorse informal singing by non-professionals for celebrations or specific social events. Regardless of the interpretation, this tradition demonstrates that singing girls were employed to entertain in a variety of different ways, and that the type of entertainment they provided carried certain social implications for the patron.

Until the late seventh century, free Arab men were socially prohibited from practising the profession of music as it was considered unmanly and ignoble. That did not mean that men did not sing or perform; they generally did so under allowable conditions such as at a celebration or with other men. The prohibition seems to have existed for some time, though the specific reason or origin is unknown. Most likely, it was due to a combination of factors, including the ancient associations of music with slave women, the culture of the pre-Islamic nomadic Arabs and the continued existence of cross-gendered individuals.²³

Despite social strictures, some men made their living as musicians, including adopting feminine dress and mannerisms and playing women’s

²¹ *Hadith* (pl. *ahādith*) are the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. The parenthetical statements following the name of Aisha and the Prophet are formulaic and confer a blessing.

²² From *Sahih Muslim, The Book of Prayers (Kitāb al-Salat)*, Book IV, no. 1938, Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement, University of Southern California, <<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/muslim/004-smt.php>>.

²³ The nomadic Arabs had little need for a formal, sedentary court and the associated trappings of wealth. They privileged poetry above all other arts and were known outside their own culture for their skill as poets. Prowess in battle was also essential, even in the merchant clans. While the Arabs did engage in trade with and fight as mercenaries for Persia, Egypt, Rome and Byzantium, these cultures also represented decadence and a sedentary lifestyle. Singing girls, young boys and men for sexual amusement and wine were representative of that lifestyle, though Arabs did indulge in the same amusements when at rest or after battle.

instruments.²⁴ Their choice of profession, in conjunction with their outward gender performance, categorised them as having both male and female traits, earning them the pejorative label *mukhannathūn* or effeminate. The word *mukhannath*, from the root *khanith*, originally meant hermaphrodite, not necessarily in the physical sense, but more akin to the Greek understanding of an individual sharing physical and social characteristics of both genders.

Their position within pre-Islamic society is implied in this *hadith*:

Abu Huraira reported:²⁵ ‘A mukhannath who had dyed his hands and feet with henna was brought to the Prophet (sallallahū alayhi wasallām). He asked: “What is the matter with this man?” He was told: “Apostle of Allah! He affects women’s get-up.” So he ordered regarding him and he was banished to an-Naqi. The people said: “Apostle of Allah! should we not kill him?” He said: “I have been prohibited from killing people who pray.” *Abu Usamah (added): “Naqi” is a region near Medina ... [emphasis mine]*’.²⁶

The use of henna to paint hands and feet is an additional marker of femininity, while the reference to ‘people who pray’ can be interpreted to mean that the man was a Muslim, client (*mawla*) or a fellow monotheist (i.e. Christian or Jew). While there is no obvious connection between the *mukhannath* and music in this *hadith*, the additional comment regarding Medina is suggestive, as Medina was known for its musical culture before and after Islam.²⁷

Based on additional references in the *hadith*, historical and literary sources, *mukhannathūn* apparently worked as hired entertainers for weddings and possibly as marriage brokers. It was believed they had no desire for women, and therefore were safe for women to have as unsupervised guests in their tents. Needless to say, while it is likely that some preferred same-sex

²⁴ Small hand drums, tambourines, flutes and stringed instruments were still considered women’s instruments. Later, stringed instruments become more gender neutral, as in the case of the *ūd*.

²⁵ Abu Huraira is a somewhat controversial figure in that he is credited with reciting thousands of *hadith*, a number of which have been shown to be of dubious authenticity. According to some sources, he not only clashed with the Prophet but with his favourite wife, Aisha, because he disapproved of women having any say or authority in the new Islamic community. For an analysis of Abu Huraira and the problem of authenticity, see F. Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, trans. M. J. Lakeland (Oxford, 1991).

²⁶ From *Sunan Abu Dawūd, The Book of General Behaviour*, Kitāb al-Adab, Book 41, no. 4910. The translator rendered *mukhannathūn* as ‘hermaphrodite’. Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement, University of Southern California, <<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/abudawud/041-sat.php>>.

²⁷ See E. K. Rowson, ‘The Effeminate of Early Medina’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 111 (1991), pp. 671–93. The musical culture of early Medina and the influence of the *mukhannathūn* are also summarised in H. G. Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music to the 13th Century* (London, 1929; repr. 1995), and mentioned many times in the *Aghani*. See e.g. the story of Tuways in al-Isbahani, *Kitāb al-Aghani*, iii, p. 27, and that of al-Dalal, iv, p. 269.

relationships or were biological hermaphrodites or eunuchs, a number of them took advantage of their position by engaging in illicit love affairs.²⁸

The figure of the *mukhannathūn* later came to be invested with several additional layers of meaning: a literary reference to a *mukhannath* could not only refer to their musical performance, but might include a moral or religious judgement associated with their assumed promiscuity, lewdness and drunkenness. Much of this came about because the *mukhannathūn* specialised in the outrageous. In the seventh and eighth centuries a number of them were known for their cheeky poetry, excessive drinking and generally bad behaviour. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, they also enjoyed a fair amount of patronage by high-ranking officials, the nobility and wealthy women.²⁹

By the end of the eighth century, the Islamic empire had spread rapidly into North Africa, Persia, Anatolia and regions of what is now Europe. As older civilisations around the region were conquered or annexed, the early Islamic caliphates recognised the need for a wealthy and intimidating court and began to adapt the court customs of their neighbours. Singing girls worked in the Umayyad (661–750 CE) courts, and for a time the *mukhannathūn* flourished in the Hijaz, which remained a respected centre of music. When the Abbasids came to power in 750 CE, they quickly consolidated their initially tenuous power by building the city of Baghdad, which was located in a more accessible, central place than the previous Umayyad capital of Damascus. They soon brought stability to the new empire through a judicious blend of diplomatic relations, cunning, trade and periodic aggression, until by the ninth century Baghdad was the Empire's acknowledged centre of culture and politics.

Islam, as both a religion and way of life, was still very much a work in progress during the ninth century. The compilation of the first collections of *hadith* coincided with the development of the major schools of Islamic jurisprudence.³⁰ Historians were beginning to write Islamic history and develop the fundamentals of Islamic historiography. The ninth century

²⁸ For research on the figure of the *mukhannathūn* in literature and court records, see Rowson, 'The Effeminate of Early Medina'; id., 'Gender Irregularity as Entertainment: Institutionalized Transvestism at the Caliphal Court in Medieval Baghdad', in S. Farmer and C. B. Pasternack (eds.), *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 2003), pp. 45–72; and id., 'The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists', in J. Epstein and K. Straub (eds.), *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York, 1991), pp. 50–79.

²⁹ Rowson, 'The Effeminate of Early Medina'. See also Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music*, and A. Shiloah, 'Music and Religion in Islam', *Acta Musicologica*, 69 (1997), pp. 143–55.

³⁰ The two major canonical collections of *hadith* were compiled in the 9th c. by al-Bukhari (810–70 CE) and Abu Muslim (821–75 CE). Through comparison of extant manuscripts and interrogating the memories of *hadith* reciters, these scholars took what is estimated to be about 600,000 *hadith* and reduced them to approximately 7,000 *sahih*, or those considered true

also saw the beginning of the first major translation projects of Greek literature and science into Syriac and Arabic.

Singing girls were used in ever greater numbers by the Abbasid caliphs until by the late eighth and early ninth century they were essential to nearly all court entertainments. Because of their popularity, ownership and patronage of singing girls became a status item for courtiers and those seeking upward mobility. The combination of a rising middle class, increased wealth and stability in the Abbasid's seat of power and the establishment of laws related to marriage and adultery created the right atmosphere for the development of a courtesan–patron dynamic.

Definition of the courtesan is not always clear-cut and takes many forms cross-culturally, but there are some general similarities. Similarities can also be found in those cultures with a courtesan class in the type of arguments used, by supporters and detractors alike, relating to the moral, religious and artistic consequences of courtesan patronage. Their supporters tend to laud their skill, beauty and wit, while their detractors point to their use of music, poetry and seduction to distract men from virtuous living. In many cases, it is not the courtesan herself who is at fault; rather it is the intimacy of her performance, along with the subject matter of her songs/poetry that is attacked. Since courtesans are frequently associated with music, these arguments are often used as the basis for discussion of broader social issues such as the role of sacred vs. secular music and the influence of music on the emotions, as well as concerns about music being a catalyst for drinking, gambling and other sensual pursuits.

Essentially, a courtesan is a female professional, with varying degrees of musical skill, literacy and education, who provides companionship, sex and/or entertainment in a mostly, though not always, urban environment. Her performances could take place at court by invitation of the nobility or ruler or in the home of the courtesan herself. The majority of her patrons came from the upper classes and those aspiring to upward mobility. Courtesans tend to appear in those cultures making a transition from feudal or tribal organisation to that of a more urban and bourgeois society, where social mobility is becoming available to the middle classes and the 'marriage system separates love and sexual passion from the institution of

hadith. This process also developed into a system for evaluating and authenticating *hadith*. That is not to say all the *hadith* are indeed authentic; many are still contested. The four major Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) which developed in the 8th and 9th centuries are the Hanafi, after Abu Hanifa (c. 699–767 CE); Maliki, after al-Malik (c. 715–95), Shafi'i, after al-Shafi'i (767–820 CE); and Hanbali, after Ibn Hanbal (780–855 CE). See J. Schacht, 'Fikh', *EL*², ii, pp. 886–89. All the schools differ in terms of legal methodology, points of law and uses of *hadith* and reason in determining legal decisions. They also all differ on the subject of the legality of singing, musical instruments and listening, though only the later followers of the Hanbali school ruled music illegal under Islamic law.

matrimony'.³¹ Based on their background, education and relative autonomy, singing girls fit this definition of a courtesan. However, not all had the skill, intelligence or ambition to obtain regular patronage.³²

Singing girls were acquired through trade or conquest, carefully trained and extremely expensive to own and maintain. Prospective singing girls were selected based on physical beauty, country of origin, aptitude and market preferences. Their training included music, poetry, Qur'anic recitation and, since they were frequently foreign, the Arabic language. They were given descriptive names, such as Jamila (Beautiful) or Bas-Bas (Caress). Singing girls were also expected to memorise thousands of songs and poems and were viewed by many as living archives. Their preferred instrument remained the lute, though they also played different types of plucked stringed instruments and hand percussion. Lastly, and most ominously, they were believed to have been subject to additional training in seduction, sexual techniques and emotional manipulation.

As in the Ancient Near East, slavery in the early Islamic era could be a temporary state and was not an impediment to social advancement. Singing girls and other female slaves had the opportunity to earn freedom through the birth of a child, to be freed for marriage, or to buy their freedom outright. Since an ambitious singing girl could potentially earn the affection of the caliph or enough money to purchase her own singing girls, there was intense and constant politicking in the women's quarters. The sources provide many examples of such intrigues, including assassination attempts, torture and murder.³³

At court, singing girls performed solo or in groups in both private and public settings. Musical gatherings, called *majālis* (singular, *majlis*) were

³¹ See the Introduction in Feldman and Gordon (eds.), *The Courtesan's Arts*, p. 6.

³² Though the sources attest that singing girls wrote and disseminated their own works, all the extant sources were written by men. There are a number of sources, including the *Aghani*, which provide biographies of singing girls, their poems, information about their patrons/owners and colourful tales of their exploits. Whether or not these are factual is hard to determine, though the fame and existence of celebrity musicians at the time is certain. The accounts of singing girls fall into several categories: (1) Stories which simply mention them as a group as part of a bigger event; (2) stories of individual singing girls who achieved fame or notoriety but had a limited long-term impact; and (3) famous singing girls who wrote books of songs, performed for several caliphs and had considerable wealth of their own. While all accounts provide insight into the performance and role of singing girls, it is this last category that most accurately represents the courtesan-patron relationship and, I suggest, had the most lasting impact on musical discourse.

³³ According to one story, the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi (775–85 CE) was rumoured to have been poisoned by one of his slave girls when he intercepted and ate a poisoned pear that one slave girl was having sent to her rival. See al-Tabari, *The Early 'Abbasi Empire*, ii, p. 119. In the court of al-Muqtadir (908–32 CE), the Queen Mother's stewardess, or *qahramana*, was also adept at torture. See N. M. El-Cheikh, 'The Qahramana in the Abbasid Court: Position and Functions', *Studia Islamica*, 97 (2003), pp. 41–55.

organised around a patronage system and subject to strict rules for performance practice, dress, subject matter and etiquette. A *majlis* could be convened by the caliph at any time and attendance by courtiers and musicians was mandatory. When calling for a *majlis*, the caliph might also set a theme, such as a specific poet or topic, and the party could potentially last for days.³⁴ Musicians were expected not only to be able to compose music and poetry extemporaneously, but to adapt to the mood of their audience.³⁵ If a musician was successful, he or she earned increased patronage, honour and a financial reward. Failure could result in banishment from court, public ridicule or a beating.³⁶

The descriptions of performance practice suggest that the majority of the music performed was improvised, though there was apparently a canon of 'composed' or set melodies that were part of the repertory and used as a framework for improvisation. Musicians had a broad and subtle palette of melodic and rhythmic modes from which to choose and certain modes were associated with specific poetic themes or emotional states.³⁷

Current theories about the development of the medieval Islamic modal system suggest that it had its beginnings in the ninth and tenth century and was derived initially from existing modal systems from Persia and Mesopotamia, and later influenced by Greek music theory.³⁸ By the tenth

³⁴ For detailed studies of music performance practice in the early Islamic courts, see G. Sawa, *Music Performance Practice in the Early Abbasid Era, 132–320 AH/750–932 AD* (Toronto, 1989); E. Neubauer, *Musiker am Hof der frühen Abbasiden* (Frankfurt am Main, 1965); and M. Stiglbauer, 'Die Sängerinnen am Abbasidenhof um die Zeit des Kalifen Al-Mutawakkil nach dem *Kiṭāb Al-Aghani* des Abu-l-farag Al-Isbahani und anderen Quellen dargestellt' (Ph.D. diss., Universität Wien, 1975). See also D. Brookshaw, 'Palaces, Pavilions and Pleasure Gardens: The Context and Setting of the Medieval *Majlis*', *Middle Eastern Literatures, incorporating Edebiyat*, 6 (2003), pp. 199–223.

³⁵ The audience played an important role in determining the progression of a performance – more so than the musicians themselves. This interaction between audience and performer is frequently attested in the literature and is still a factor in contemporary practice. For a discussion of the connection between medieval and contemporary practice, see G. Sawa, 'The Survival of Some Aspects of Medieval Arabic Performance Practice', *Ethnomusicology*, 25 (1981), pp. 73–86.

³⁶ Sawa, *Music Performance Practice*, pp. 111–44 and 176–200. See also G. Sawa, 'The Status and Roles of the Secular Musicians in the *Kiṭāb Al-Aghani* (Book of Songs) of Abu Al-Faraj Al-Isbahani (D.356 AH/967 AD)', *Asian Music*, 17 (1985), pp. 69–82.

³⁷ A. Shiloah, 'The Arabic Concept of Mode', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 34 (1981), pp. 19–42 and id., 'Music and Religion in Islam'. See also Sawa, *Music Performance Practice*, pp. 167–70.

³⁸ See in particular F. Shehadi, *Philosophies of Music in Medieval Islam* (Leiden and New York, 1995); Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music*; id., 'Greek Theorists of Music in Arabic Translation', *Isis*, 13 (1930), pp. 325–33; and id., 'The Old Arabian Melodic Modes', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3/4 (1965), pp. 99–102. See also Ikhwan al-Safa, *The Epistle on Music*, trans. A. Shiloah (Tel Aviv, 1978) and Shiloah, 'The Arabic Concept of Mode'. For the use of rhythmic and melodic modes in performance practice, see Sawa, *Music Performance Practice*, pp. 72–107.

century, the complex system of intervallic relations and theories of improvisation was beginning to be codified, forming the theoretical foundation of classical Arabian music.³⁹

The improvisatory nature of music performance and composition is attested in the literature, though a form of notation may have existed by the tenth or eleventh century. Few examples remain and there are not enough to determine a method for reading them.⁴⁰ As with early notation in the West, it was probably a mnemonic device to aid in the swift retrieval of composed melodies/poems by providing a visual reminder of what modes were generally used with which poems.⁴¹

While court musicians were all held to the same high standards, how musicians performed their gender roles influenced their reception. The performance expectations of singing girls differed from those of male musicians because singing girls were also expected to perform as courtesans. As slaves, singing girls could not be veiled and frequently performed in mixed company; therefore, they had many opportunities to solicit patronage through a carefully crafted display of intimacy and availability. Some chose to be overtly sensual by using scents, painting poetry on their bodies and presenting gifts of locks of hair or lute strings to prospective lovers. Others, however, apparently downplayed their sexual availability or used it only as a means to further their musical career.⁴²

³⁹ Farmer, 'Greek Theorists of Music'; id., *A History of Arabian Music*, pp. 149–53; and Shiloah, 'The Arabic Concept of Mode', for specifics on the history and development of Arabic mode. See also A. Shiloah, *Musical in the World of Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study* (Detroit, MI, 1995) and O. Wright, 'Musiki', *ET*².

⁴⁰ Notation of a type is referred to in the *Kitāb al-Aghani* and a few other music treatises, but finding a means to read it is still being researched. A sample of notation from a 13th-c. treatise can be found in Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music*, pl. 3, facing p. 202. Since rhythm was the foundation of medieval Arabic music, recent musicological studies have focused more on Arabic treatises dedicated to the uses of rhythm and rhythmic modes in early Islamic music theory. For the most recent study, see G. Sawa, *Rhythmic Theories and Practices in Arabic Writings to 339AH/950CE* (Ottawa, 2009).

⁴¹ This practice is similar to uses of notation for memory retrieval in the Western musical tradition. See A. M. Busse-Berger, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* (Berkeley, 2005). Since the majority of Arabian music was improvised, there was less of a need to memorise formulae for vertical composition (i.e. polyphony); however, musicians still needed to retain a vast repertoire of melodic and rhythmic modes in memory, as well as the many possibilities for using them singly and in modulation.

⁴² A number of singing girls repented of their former life as musicians and retired, married or opened schools to train singing girls. Even if the methods by which they acquired their wealth were considered immoral, once they repented and stopped performing publicly, a singing girl, even one with a notorious past, could be 'forgiven' and lead a life of quiet piety. A number of famous – and infamous – singing girls gained a degree of public absolution in this manner, though they would periodically come out of retirement if there was something they wanted or needed. See e.g. the story of Arib manipulating a land deal through her talent in the memoirs of al-Tanukhi, *Table Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge*, pp. 144–6.

By the eighth century, men were beginning to be accepted as court musicians, primarily because the first celebrity musicians were foreign men or men of foreign extraction. Referred to generically as *musiqar* or *mughanni*, they brought new techniques and instrumental styles to court. These were incorporated into existing traditions and influenced the development of classical Arabian performance practice. Despite the celebrity and wealth many obtained, the profession of music never completely lost its taint. Because of their choice of profession, male musicians, even revered artists, were prohibited from holding certain titles or sitting in a place of honour at social events.⁴³

Mukhammathūn continued to remain at court, though their performances now focused on theatrics or buffoonery, with less emphasis on music. Some of this was due to the court's increasing reliance on singing girls and male musicians as well as growing demands for different types of entertainment.⁴⁴ Another possible reason is that during the ninth century, court preferences for sexual companions shifted from adult or young men to young slave boys, who, like singing girls (and all slave women) were considered sexually available. The result was a lively debate on the relative merits of young women versus young men as sexual partners.⁴⁵ At one point, this gender play extended to dressing singing girls as boys and serving boys as singing girls, then having them sing and recite poetry associated with their adopted gender.

Though there are many sources from the ninth and tenth centuries that reference singing girls, the ninth-century writers al-Jahiz and Ibn al-Washshā were among the first to use them symbolically as representatives of a larger social problem. Both authors were intimately acquainted with the

⁴³ For those musicians wishing to overcome the stigma of their station, the only recourse was through an appropriate display of propriety. Musicians who behaved correctly, including singing girls, were described as being acceptable to polite society – in essence, as having risen above their station. Propriety was shown in lifestyle, genre choice and demeanour in performance, even to the extent of hiding the tools of their profession, i.e. their instrument, in order to mask their true nature. This use of propriety is attested in the *Aghani*, and discussed in Sawa, 'The Status and Roles of the Secular Musicians'.

⁴⁴ See S. Moreh, *Live Theater and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arab World* (New York, 1992).

⁴⁵ This fad is the subject of a saucy essay by al-Jahiz, the title of which can be roughly translated as *Dialogue between the Concubines and the Catamites*. See al-Jahiz, *Kitāb Moufakharat al-Jawāri wa l'ghilman* (Beirut, 1957). A brief extract in English is available in al-Jahiz, *Nine Essays of Al-Jahiz*, trans. W. M. Hutchins (American University Studies, Series VII: Theology and Religion, 53; New York, 1989). Ibn al-Washshā also refers to courtly sexual preferences several times throughout the *Brocade*, particularly in chapter 20, which I discuss further below. For a recent study of homoeroticism and gender play in Arabic literature, see J. W. Wright, Jr. and E. Rowson (eds.), *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York, 1997).

court and court etiquette, well educated and enjoyed a certain amount of celebrity.⁴⁶ They would also have been familiar with and influenced by the Greek and Persian translation projects taking place at the Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom).⁴⁷ Despite their unflattering representation of singing girls, it is likely that both authors patronised or possibly owned singing girls themselves. As men of their rank and status, it would be expected for them to do so.⁴⁸ Through their depiction of singing girls, one sees a clear transition in the roles of singing girls: no longer perceived as musical and/or sexual diversions but ranging from low-level musical concubines to courtesans. While all singing girls required patronage, the upper-level courtesans pursued patrons, sometimes rapaciously, worked their network for their own benefit and infiltrated court culture at all levels.

The development of the courtesan–patron dynamic is evidenced not only in how the courtesans are described, but in how they are labelled. Al-Jahiz consistently refers to them as *qiyān*; he is one of the few to distinguish them specifically from *jawāri* (female slaves, musical concubines). His intention to make this distinction is also seen in his other work, most notably in the *Kitāb Moufakharat al-Jawāri wa l'ghilman* (The Dialogue between the Concubines and the Catamites), where he uses *jawāri*, as opposed to the *Risala al-Qiyān* (*Epistle on the Singing Girls*), where he is careful to use *qiyān*. Ibn al-Washshā also refers to them as *qiyān* as opposed to *jawāri*, though some of the poetry he cites uses both terms. The choice in label seems partly due to metrical choice by the original author, but also, based on my survey of the poetry, further illustrates the growing

⁴⁶ Based on references to specific quotations or works within these texts, al-Jahiz, Ibn al-Washshā and Ibn Abī'l Dūnya certainly knew of each other. Since they were associated with the Baghdad court around the same time, it is also possible that they met.

⁴⁷ The Bayt al-Hikmah, or House of Wisdom, was a research library established in Baghdad by the caliph al-Ma'mun (813–33 CE) in 830. Al-Ma'mun commissioned scholars to make translations of Greek and Syriac texts into Arabic for the library, sending some as far as Constantinople to obtain copies of Greek texts for further study. Al-Jahiz references Greek philosophy in a number of his works, and possibly knew Greek himself. In the introduction to her French edition of the *Brocade*, Siham Bouhlal notes that Ibn al-Washshā referred to Hippocrates and Socrates in one of his other works, the *Kitāb al-Fadil*, as well as utilised the Greek system of temperaments in his discussion of passionate love in the *Brocade*. Like al-Jahiz, even if he himself did not read Greek, it was likely that Ibn al-Washshā was familiar with the growing body of work generated by the various translation projects taking place in Baghdad at the time. See *Le Livre de brocart* (The Book of Brocade), pp. 19–20.

⁴⁸ In the *Fihrist*, al-Nadim includes several quotes by al-Jahiz which suggest he owned concubines despite his unattractive appearance and famous dislike of emotional entanglements. See al-Nadim, *The Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadim: A 10th Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, trans. B. Dodge, 2 vols (New York, 1970), i, p. 402. Similarly, the depth of Ibn al-Washshā's detail about singing girls and their perils suggests a certain amount of personal experience.

distinction between upper-class courtesans and musical concubines. This differentiation is seen in the work of their contemporaries and later authors as well; *qiyān* might also be referred to as *jawāri* owing to their status as slaves, but not all *jawāri* were *qiyān*.

The *Epistle on the Singing Girls* was written as a satirical piece aimed firmly at the traders and patrons of singing girls. Though brief, it is a masterpiece of wit. Al-Jahiz begins with a list of pseudonymous authors, followed by a digressive exhortation about love and women and then he finally arrives at the singing girls themselves.⁴⁹ He consistently represents singing girls as having shaky morals and being greedy, but he also notes that their origins as slaves and training give them little choice. Their musicianship is secondary to their role as courtesans, though al-Jahiz easily acknowledges their technical skill.

Throughout the *Epistle on the Singing Girls*, al-Jahiz uses singing girls as a symbol of middle- and upper-class greed and excess. He points to the corrupt economies related to their trade and their training in sexual and musical arts, commenting on the ways in which patronage of singing girls functions as a catalyst for worse sins. At the heart of his treatise is the deeper social concern of men bankrupting themselves for singing girls, sinking into debt and debauchery, and, ultimately, neglecting their families and social position.

Al-Jahiz also provides a glimpse into the training of singing girls, musically and otherwise:

An accomplished singing girl has a repertoire of upwards of four thousand songs, each of them two to four verses long, so that the total amount of poetry contained in it, if one multiplies one figure by the other, comes to ten thousand verses, in which there is not one mention of God (except by inadvertence) or of the terrors of future punishment or the attractions of future reward. They are all founded on references to fornication, pimping, passion, yearning, desire and lust. Later on she continues to study her profession assiduously, *learning from music teachers* [emphasis mine] whose lessons are all flirting and whose directives are a seduction. This she is compelled to do for the sake of her profession: for if she shirks it [her skill] will slip away; if she neglects it, it will fade; if she does not make use of it, it will come to a standstill – and anything which

⁴⁹ There has been considerable speculation as to whether or not the authors listed in the *Epistle* were actual acquaintances of al-Jahiz. Beeston presumed the list to be purely fictitious based on the translation of some of the names themselves: ‘Cupping-Glass’ and ‘Scalpel’, for example. Others, such as Charles Pellat, suggested that Jahiz was, in fact, referring to real people, as it was not uncommon to have a descriptive *kunya* or nickname. For example, Jahiz’s *kunya* translates as ‘the bug-eyed’ because he apparently had bulging eyes. See Beeston’s Introduction to the *Epistle on the Singing Girls*, pp. 3–4. For a more recent discussion of the list of authors, see A. Cheikh-Moussa, ‘La Négation d’Éros ou le ‘išq d’après deux épîtres d’al-Ġāhiz’, *Studia Islamica*, 72 (1990), pp. 71–119.

comes to a standstill is on the brink of recession. The thing which distinguishes the masters of crafts from the unskilled practitioner is the greater degree of [the formers'] assiduous practice of it.⁵⁰

One of the significant differences in the position taken by al-Jahiz in relation to that of Ibn al-Washshā is that while al-Jahiz attributes the moral turpitude of singing girls to greed, he acknowledges they are still capable of emotion and regret. Ibn al-Washshā, however, expresses the belief that the bad intentions of singing girls are not the product of circumstance or human failure, but somehow ingrained in their souls. Variations on his position regarding the inherent immoral qualities of singing girls can be found in descriptions by later authors as well.

Ibn al-Washshā wrote the *Book of Brocade* to educate courtiers and gentlemen on what he refers to as the art of refinement. He focuses on the necessary trappings of refinement, including dress, ornament and manners, but none of these elements is successful without a proper education. The pursuit of refinement was not limited to men, either. Ibn al-Washshā includes periodic advice to the refined woman as well, with the most detailed advice dedicated to modest dress and appropriate modes of expression in mixed company. The *Brocade* is more than a fussy list of dos and don'ts, however; it is a philosophy of life based on good behaviour, appropriate friendships, elegant writing and chaste, noble love.

Like the *Epistle on the Singing Girls*, the *Brocade* is beautifully written, filled with poetry, witticisms and religious references. Ibn al-Washshā was renowned as a grammarian and it is therefore not surprising that he places emphasis throughout on the proper use of the word as the sign of good breeding. Perhaps by way of illustration, he wrote much of the *Brocade* in rhymed prose.

⁵⁰ Al-Jahiz, *Epistle on the Singing Girls*, p. 35, Arabic text, p. 21.

و تروي الحاذقة منهن أربعة الف صوت فصاعدا يكون الصوت فيها البيتين الى اربعة ابيات عدد ما يدخل في ذلك من الشعرا ١٨٧/ ب/ ضرب بعضه ببعض عشرة الف بيت ليس فيها ذكر الله الا عن غفلة و لا ترهب عقاب ولا ترغيب في ثواب و انما بنيت كلها على ذكر الزنا و القيادة والعشق و الصبوة والشوق و الغلظة ثم لا تتفك من الدراسة لصناعتها و منكرة عليها تاخذ من المطارحين الذين طرحهم كله تجميش و اشارتهم مرادة و هي مضطرة الى ذلك في صناعتها لانها {ء} ان جفتها تفلتت و ان اهلتها نقصت و ان لم تستفد منها وقتت وكل واقفت فالى نقصان اقرب و انما فرق بين اصحاب الصناعات وبين من لم يحسنه التزيد فيها والمواظبة عليها

Though Beeston translates the italicised statement as 'learning from music teachers', the Arabic does not specify the type of teacher, only that the singing girl must study. On p. 61 in the commentary, Beeston notes that the meaning of طرح (*tarih*) in the lexica includes 'to teach a tune'. It also, however, carries additional meanings of being cast off, discarded or submitted to. Given al-Jahiz's previous comment on the value of the songs sung by singing girls and his subsequent opinion on the importance of practising one's crafts, it is likely that rather than choosing a more specific term, his use of *tarih* is intended to imply all aspects of a singing girl's profession, not just music.

The *Brocade* is in two parts, with the first dealing with straightforward etiquette and advice for the courtier: what constitutes a proper education for a refined person, proper choices in friendship and companionship, how to behave appropriately in elevated company, and most importantly, how to guard against dangerous passions. Among the authorities cited, he includes a number of quotations from al-Jahiz and even one poem attributed to Ibn Abi'l Dūnya.⁵¹

In the second section of the *Brocade*, Ibn al-Washshā goes into particulars, such as how to write a good letter and the many uses of poetry.⁵² It is here that he dedicates an entire chapter to the problem of singing girls. Chapter 20 of the *Brocade* is entitled *On the character and censure of singing slave girls, the influence of the ruses they use in seduction (of young men)*, and, like other sections, it is written in rhymed prose interspersed with poetry.⁵³ Here, Ibn al-Washshā goes into explicit detail about how singing girls seduce men. He then follows up on this theme in the next chapter, which is dedicated to the physical and emotional repercussions of succumbing to passionate love.

In the opening paragraphs of chapter 20, Ibn al-Washshā establishes the depth of a singing girl's immorality and how far she will go for the sake of her greed: 'The secret (wicked) intentions of singing girls are demonstrable at a glance. If one sees a young man at a gathering (*majlis*) with wealth and great fortune, of good cheer and handsome, she would undertake to use her (feminine) charm so that she might draw him to her. In so doing, she breaks him to her will.'⁵⁴

He continues in ever greater detail as to their seduction techniques, elaborating on how they maintain a man's affection with love letters and drain his resources through demands for expensive gifts:

She gives him her gaze, beginning first with a glance, then a wink, then gives him her eye. And then, she signals him with her palm, would sing over his goblet, wanting to please him. She would drink the excess from his goblet, make as if to kiss his head,

⁵¹ I cite both the French and Arabic editions here, indicating the French edition as Ibn al-Washshā (F), the Arabic as Ibn al-Washshā (A). All translations from the *Brocade* are from the Arabic and are my own. The poem attributed to Ibn Abi'l Dūnya reads: 'Renounce love, for love aids in confusion and makes one stupid, or swiftly consummates that state; love is contemptible, a burdensome burden. In the face of affection, the steadiest of men are destroyed.' See Ibn al-Washshā (F), p. 109, Ibn al-Washshā (A), p. 103.

⁵² These include inscribing poetry on the body with scents, writing love poems on apples to be given to a lover, and poetry inscribed on musical instruments.

⁵³ In the French edition of the *Brocade*, chapter 20 begins on p. 135, in the Arabic, p. 134. The title in Arabic reads: باب صفة ذم القيان ونفوذ حيلتهن في الغتيان

⁵⁴ Ibn al-Washshā (F), pp. 136–7, Ibn Washsha (A), pp. 134–5.

ومن أدل الأشياء على خُبث سرائر الإماء أنَّ الواحدة مِنْهُنَّ، إذا رأت في مجلس فتى له غنى وكثرة مال، ويسار وحسن حال، مالت إليه لِتُخَذِّعَهُ، و أَقْبَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ لِتُصَرِّعَهُ

Translated literally, the last sentence reads that she wrestles him down.

until he tumbles into the web of her love. She tires him with her tricks; his heart is veiled in her love, making him greedy to be near her. She envelops him in friendly flattery, captures him with swift dissemblings, deceptions and craftiness and demands that he come to her. Weeping when he takes his leave, she shows sadness when they part. Then, she sends him letters, tied with lute strings, with locks of her hair . . .⁵⁵

Though al-Jahiz and Ibn al-Washshā included religious references in their work, they were both secularists. Al-Jahiz famously subscribed to the Muʿtazilite doctrine, which was an early incarnation of Islamic rationalism.⁵⁶ Citing *hadith*, pre-Islamic poetry and Islamic history was in accordance with the writing conventions of their time. Their knowledge of Greek and Persian literature gave them additional tools for creating social commentary, which can be seen in the impact of Greek ideals related to love, excess and passion on their approach to the role of singing girls. Though both authors name individual singing girls in their work, they primarily represent them in the abstract.

On one level, singing girls appear in each text as harmless amusements, providing an intimate diversion as concubines and musicians. Their danger, however, was the effect such a diversion could have, in that they had the ability to lead men away from good living by filling them with lust and passion. Much like the ancient Greeks, the Arabs believed that passionate love was akin to madness, and both authors discuss passion in terms of illness, malady and malaise. Singing girls were a catalyst, as once trapped by passion, men found it easier to become diverted further into sin.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

و مَنَحَتْهُ نَظْرَها، وَأَبْدَتْهُ بَصَرَها، وَغَمَزَتْهُ بِطَرْفِها، وَ أَشَارَتْ إِلَيْه بِكَفِّها، وَ غَنَّتْ عَلَى كَاسَاتِها، وَمَالَتْ إِلَى مَرْضَاتِها، وَشَرِبَتْ مِنْ فَضْلَةِ كَاسِها، وَأَوَمَّتْ إِلَى تَقْبِيلِ رَأْسِها، حَتَّى تَوْفِقَ الْمَسْكِينُ فِي جِبَالِها، وَتُرْهَقَ بِاحْتِياْلِها، وَتُعْلَقَ قَلْبُها حُبِّها، وَتُطْمَعِها فِي قُرْبِها، وَتَحْوِيهَ بِلُطْفِ تَمَلُّقِها، وَتُسَبِّحَ بِبِدِيعِ تَقْطِيعِها، وَبِالْمَكْرِ وَالْخِذَاعِ، وَتُطَلِّبُها لِلْاجْتِمَاعِ، وَتِيَاكِبُها لِفَرْقَتِها، وَتَحَازِنُها عِنْدَ رَوْحَتِها، ثُمَّ تَرْسُلُ إِلَيْه بِالرَّسْلِ، وَتُعَادِيهِ بِالْخُتْلِ، وَتُخْبِرُهُ عَنْ سِهرِها

Ibn al-Washshā utilises a number of words in this passage which carry several meanings, many related to flattery, submission and intimations of sex. For example, drinking the dregs of someone's glass was an act of subservience and to be avoided. By so doing, a singing girl would demonstrate her servitude on a physical, social and emotional level. I am especially indebted to Hind Derar for advising me on the linguistic subtleties contained in this passage and the implications behind drinking the dregs of someone's wine.

⁵⁶ The Muʿtazilite doctrine began in the 8th c. in Basra, where al-Jahiz was born and educated. In the 9th c., the caliph al-Maʿmun (813–33 CE) made it the official doctrine of his reign. The basis of the doctrine lay in the free will of a person and the createdness, rather than the eternal nature, of the Qurʾan. Influenced by Greek philosophy, logic and reason were incorporated into theology by Muʿtazilite scholars. It was not a well-liked position by some traditionalists and counter-movements soon developed. After al-Maʿmun's reign, the doctrine quickly lost favour and was eventually revoked by the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–61 CE). As a result, adherents of the Muʿtazilite doctrine were labelled as heretics when more conservative, and popular, theological doctrines came to ascendancy. Despite this shift in theological politics, the doctrine itself remained a viable theological position for several centuries. See D. Gimaret, 'Muʿtazila', *ET*², vii, pp. 783–93.

Despite the fact that the primary function of singing girls was musical entertainment, neither al-Jahiz nor Ibn al-Washshā questioned the legal or moral nature of music itself. Al-Jahiz even clarified his position on music by commenting that singing was an acceptable diversion and stating it should not be condemned simply because singing girls used it for their profession. Music or musicianship is not the problem in both representations. Rather, al-Jahiz and Ibn al-Washshā emphasise the consequences of patronage of singing girls, using them as symbolic of the moral decay, greed and hypocrisy rooted in their patronage.⁵⁷

The *mukhannathūn* are not mentioned by al-Jahiz or Ibn al-Washshā either, but this again is likely because they were no longer strictly associated with music or patronised as overtly as before. Though same-sex relationships were considered illegal under Islamic law, the court tended to ignore this except when passions got out of control. In his chapter on the singing girls, Ibn al-Washshā decries the fad for chasing attractive boys but his concerns had nothing to do with same-sex relationships; rather, their invocation is intended to underscore his belief that pursuit of passion and lust, regardless of the source, led to other dangerous excesses.

Religious opinion of secular diversions was not fundamentally different and was often presented in similar ways. In the case of music, however, religious opinion focused not just on the physical role of the musician/entertainer as performer and potential lover, but on the act of listening to music. Music was singled out over other diversions for a number of reasons. First, it was understood to have influence over the emotions and contained the power to heal or drive one mad. Second, there was increasing alarm over the financial and bibulous excesses of the court, which often showcased sensuous entertainments and poetry on less than noble themes. Lastly, and most seriously, music patronage, and the accumulations of sin it led to, was believed eventually to divert the unwary into apostasy.

Of especial concern was that the caliphate was frequently the most enthusiastic patron of singing girls and music. The caliphs were not merely rulers, but the leaders and exemplars of Islam. Their indulgence in such diversions, therefore, could have apocalyptic consequences, specifically damnation and transformation into unclean animals, for the entire Islamic community.

This emphasis on the apocalyptic consequences of patronage is central to the argument used by Ibn Abi'l Dūnya in the *Dhamm al-Malāhī* (Censure of Instruments of Diversion). Prior to his treatise, the term *malāhī* had

⁵⁷ Greed is a common descriptor for singing girls and used to imply they have a constant need for material, emotional and sexual gratification.

been used as a generic term to refer to musical instruments, deriving from the Arabic word *lahw*, meaning diversion.⁵⁸ Ibn Abi'l Dūnya was a respected teacher and scholar in the late ninth century and wrote a number of well-known, popular treatises related to moral living. The form of the *Censure* follows the literary standards for *adab* in that it consists of a series of *hadith* and religious references, dutifully authenticated with minimal interjection by the author. Ibn Abi'l Dūnya was not, however, a legal scholar, so his choices and use of *hadith* do not adhere to the strict standards of Islamic jurisprudence. His intention was to write for the general public and his treatise was highly influential, inspiring similar arguments as well as many counter-arguments.

Ibn Abi'l Dūnya argued that music was one of many dangerous diversions, using singing girls and *mukhannathūn* specifically as symbols linking music to corruption. His spare use of *hadith*, without additional explication, suggests that a more abstract, symbolic meaning of the figure of the 'singing girl' and '*mukhannath*' was already understood. Though literary conventions allowed him to interject or offer an interpretation of the *hadith*, which he does at infrequent intervals in the treatise, it appears that a simple invocation of specific performers was sufficient. The *hadith* in turn reference or support one another, containing additional detail to embellish his point when the symbol is not enough. Through his references to singing girls and *mukhannathūn*, he evokes a wide range of meaning for the reader, using them as the symbolic gateway to performance, instruments and the consequences of passive listening.

In the beginning of his treatise, Ibn Abi'l Dūnya immediately establishes his position that since music is a diversion, it should therefore be illegal under Islamic law. He opens with a powerful, apocalyptic *hadith*, which is also one of the only *hadith* he includes from Sahih Bukhari.⁵⁹ The *hadith* itself condemns music and performance, but by positioning the most authoritative *hadith* at the beginning, with its connection between singing girls, musical instruments associated with sensuous (i.e. entertainment)

⁵⁸ This is not to be confused with *لحو*, which means to vilify, defame. The root word Ibn Abi'l Dūnya uses is *لهو*, which means to amuse, distract or divert. By using *lahw*, Ibn Abi'l Dūnya could expand the definition of a diversion as well as make a connection with Sura Luqman, 31:6, which states: 'But there are, among men, those who purchase idle tales, without knowledge (or meaning), to mislead men from the Path of Allah and throw ridicule: for such there will be a humiliating penalty.' In this verse, *lahw* is used to indicate diversion, idleness, which is later expanded by followers of Abi'l Dūnya's position to include music. Ibn Abi'l Dūnya is among the first to stress this interpretation. One could render the title, then, as 'Censure of Instruments of Pleasure' or stretch to 'Disapprobation of Musical Instruments', which was H. Farmer's translation. See Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music*, p. 146. Since the treatise includes other activities of diversion, Robson's rendition of the title as 'Censure of Instruments of Diversion' offers, in my opinion, the best interpretation of Ibn Abi'l Dūnya's intent.

⁵⁹ Of the major canonical *hadith* collections, al-Bukhari, along with Abu Muslim, is considered the most authoritative.

music and damnation, he aligns the symbol of the musician with the threat of apostasy.

On the authority of Sahl ibn Sa'd (radhiyallahū anhu), he said, 'Allah's Apostle (sallallahū alayhi wasallām) said, "Among the last of my people there will be swallowing up, pelting, and metamorphosis." It was said, "O, apostle of Allah, when?" He said: "When the *ma'āzif* and the *qaināt* appear, and wine is considered lawful.'" The *ma'āzif* are musical instruments (*'alāt al-tarāb*), and the *qaināt* are the singing girls ...⁶⁰

Ibn Abi'l Dūnya proceeds with several pages of *hadith* supporting his position, making it clear that all forms of music-making, including mourning at funerals and singing at social events, are unacceptable. Given the choice between playing and listening, listening to music was the greater sin because it distracted one from proper religious observances. Within the context of listening, he singled out certain instruments, such as the lute, flute and *mizmār*, because they were not only condemned in certain *hadith*, but closely associated with court and tavern entertainments.⁶¹

While much of the treatise is devoted to his arguments against music, Ibn Abi'l Dūnya also included other activities he believed to be diversions, such as chess and backgammon, various forms of gambling and, lastly, fornication.⁶² Only at the end of his treatise, following a frightening parable of adultery, does he mention *mukhannathūn*: 'On the authority of Ikrima, he said, "Allah's apostle (sallallahū alayhi wasallām) cursed the house which the *mukhannath* enters.'" He follows this immediately with a *hadith* suggesting appropriate punishment, though who is to be punished

⁶⁰ Dūnya, *Tracts on Listening to Music*, p. 19, translation by Robson. In 'Ata's edition, pp. 31–2. عن سهل بن سعد رضى الله عنهما، قال: قال رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وسلم): يكون في آخر أمتي خسف وقذف ومسح قيل: يارسول الله، متى؟ قال إذا ظهرت المعازف والقينات، واستحل الخمر. والمعازف هي: آلات الطرب، والقينات الجواني المغنيات

Robson based his translation on the Berlin manuscript, which is also the basis for the modern Arabic edition of the *Dhamm Al-Malāhī*. In this quote, Ibn Abi'l Dūnya defines singing girls as 'slave singers': *jawāri mughannat*. There are three other known manuscripts of the *Dhamm al-Malāhī*, two of which are almost twice as long as the Berlin copy. As far as I am aware, the longer versions have not yet been studied in detail. One manuscript was in the al-Zahariyah library in Damascus, Syria, now probably in the new al-Assad library, the other in the Jerusalem National Library. In his survey of Arabic music treatises for RISM, Amnon Shiloah commented that he believed these manuscripts to be similar. See the entry for the *Dhamm al-Malāhī* in A. Shiloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c.900–1900): A Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in Libraries of Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Russia, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, and Supplement to Bx* (RISM, Bxa; Munich, 2003), pp. 89–90. Thus far, I have only been able to examine a copy of the manuscript held in the Jerusalem National Library. This copy contains several variations of the first *hadith* from other reciters though all convey the same basic warning.

⁶¹ The *mizmār* was a double-reed instrument and possible ancestor of the shawm. Instruments were also decidedly second place to vocal performance, and instrumental music was used in *majālis* as preludes, interludes and postludes to singing. See Sawa, *Performance Practice*, pp. 105–7, 153.

⁶² Ibn Abi'l Dūnya's definition of fornication is all sex outside marriage and includes same-sex relations.

is not clear: ‘On the authority of Uthman (referring to the Prophet) that he gave twenty lashes to a man who said to another, “O *mukhannath*”.’⁶³

Ibn Abi’l Dūnya is believed to be the first to use terms such as *ma‘āzif* and *‘alāt al-tarāb* as pejoratives.⁶⁴ As with *malāhī*, these had previously been neutral terms used generically to refer to musical instruments or the act of playing music. His usage was quickly adopted by writers who shared his position, along with the negative symbol of singing girls to represent music and audition. As a result, by the end of the ninth and into the tenth century, the singing girl was increasingly used symbolically in literature by champions and detractors alike.

The exception is al-Isbahani, writing in the tenth century, in that he was the first, and only, writer to research and record accounts of music and musicians from a historical perspective. Because of the rich detail he provided on the musical culture of his time, al-Isbahani has been the subject of the much scholarly enquiry into medieval Islamic music. As a clear lover of music and enthusiastic patron, his position on music was always positive, but that does not mean that some musicians were not ‘better’ than others. His descriptions of the actions and social performance of musicians give a vivid picture of the complexities and nuances which were developing in the hierarchy of musicians. Al-Isbahani also recorded the history and exploits of the more famous *mukhannathūn*, providing an idea of what differentiated their performance practices from that of singing girls and other male court musicians.

After the tenth century, the *mukhannathūn* are mentioned less frequently, though they still existed on the margins as actors, jesters and prostitutes. When referenced, their link to performance and sexuality is still clear and purposeful. Beginning in the eleventh century, singing girls are increasingly seen performing only in the women’s quarters, as male musicians eventually came to dominate events at court.⁶⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Islamic music discourse developed out of the need not only to establish rules for music performance and musicianship, but also to regulate listen-

⁶³ Dūnya, *Tracts on Listening to Music*, p. 40, Robson’s translation. In ‘Ata’s edition, p. 53.
و عن عكرمة، قال: لعن رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وسلم) البيت الذي يدخله المخنث و عن عثمان رضي الله عنه، أنه جلد
رجلا قال لرجل: يامخنث، عشرين جلدة

⁶⁴ See A. Shiloah, ‘Malāhī’, *El*², vi, pp. 214–16 and Shiloah, ‘Music and Religion in Islam’, pp. 146–7.

⁶⁵ The word *harem* as a specific location and social institution did not begin to be used until approximately the 12th c. Up to this point, the sources refer to the living areas of women as ‘the women’s quarters’.

ing. As music performance and audience expectations became ever more structured, so did the language used to describe them. Pre-Islamic references to music and musicians tied musicianship to sexuality, with additional inferences regarding the wealth, status or, rarely, moral character of the patron. Increasing demands for singing girls, continued use of *mukhannathūn* as entertainers and buffoons and the rise of celebrity male musicians in the early Islamic court made these associations more visible and public. It is this visibility which initiated the debates against music and necessitated specialised language to discuss the nature and effect of music.

Debate and subsequent legal rulings, however, did little to stop the development of art music, numerous philosophies of music, music theory and music history. As the legal system expanded, each school of jurisprudence took a position on music ranging from full acceptance to absolute condemnation. Though the argument moved into other areas of music in the late ninth and into the tenth centuries, the same concerns remained fundamental to social discourse. These arguments are very much alive today and continue to use remnants of the same symbolic language.

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